

Points about the inimitability of the Qur'ān, preconditions of the miracle and its reality

A miracle (*mu'jiza*) is the evidence of the Prophets which indicates their truthfulness. It is called that [the verb means “to be unable to do”] because no human being is able to do the like of it. It has five preconditions. If one of them is missing, it is not a miracle.

- It must be something which only Allah can do. This precondition is necessary because if someone comes at a time in which it is possible for there to be Messengers and claims to be a Messenger and makes his miracle consist of moving and being still, standing and sitting, that is not a miracle nor evidence of his truthfulness since another creature can do that. Miracles consist of things like splitting the sea, splitting the moon and other such things.
- It must break normal patterns. If someone comes at night and his sign is that the night will come after the day or the sun rise in the east in the morning, that is not a miracle because it is something which only Allah can do and it was not done for his sake. Things which break normal patterns are like turning a

staff into a snake, the rock splitting and the she-camel emerging, or water springing from fingers like a spring.

- It must be claimed to testify to the Message.
- It must occur in order to support this claim against those who challenge him as when he says, “I am a Prophet and my sign is that this she-camel will speak.”
- It must be that no one successfully comes up with the like of what he is challenged to do.

It is not said that the miracle with the five preconditions is limited to the truthful, because the Dajjāl, as our Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, will have immense matters appear at his hands. The difference is that one claims to be a Messenger and the other to be a Lord, and there is a great difference between the blind and the seeing.

Section

If you affirm this, know that there are two types of miracle. The first is that which is famous and whose time ended at the death of the Prophet, and the second are those transmitted by multiple traditions as being sound and confirmed and hence must be known. The precondition is that many people transmitted it and have knowledge of what they transmit and the whole chain is reliable so that it is impossible that there be any falsehood in it. This is the case with the Qur’ān which has been transmitted from large numbers of people continuously and has gone to many lands. The Qur’ān will remain a miracle until the Day of Rising whereas the miracles of other Prophets ended with their death. The Qur’ān will not be changed or altered as happened with the Torah and Gospel.

There are ten aspects to the inimitability of the Qur’ān.

- Its wondrous composition differs from every usual order in Arabic and other languages because its arrangement is not

poetry at all, as Allah says, “*We did not teach him poetry nor would it be right for him.*” (36:69) In the *Ṣaḥīḥ* Collection of Muslim, it is reported that Unays, the brother of Abū Dharr, told Abū Dharr, “In Makka I met a man who claims that Allah sent him.” He asked, “What do people say about him?” He replied, “They say: he is a poet, a soothsayer and a sorcerer.” Unays was a poet and said, “I have heard the words of the soothsayers and this is not like their words. I compared him with the reciters of poetry and it was not like them. No one after me should err and say he was a poet. He is truthful and they are liars.” When ‘Utba ibn Rabī‘a heard the Qur’ān, he affirmed that it was not sorcery or poetry and that he had never heard anything like it.

- Its style differs from all the styles of the Arabs.
- It has a lucid, eloquent style which could never come from a creature at all. Reflect on that in *Sūrat Qāf* (50) and *Sūrat az-Zumar* (39) and you will clearly see its eloquence which a creature could not possibly originate.

Ibn al-Ḥaṣṣār said, “These three – arrangement, style and lucid eloquence are found in every *sūra*, indeed, in every *āyat*, and the combination of these three distinguishes what is heard of every *āyat* and every *sūra* from the words of ordinary humans. By this there is a challenge [to opponents] and inimitability. Every *sūra* has these three, although other aspects of the ten may be ascribed to it as well. *Sūrat al-Kawthar* (108) consists of only three short *āyats*, being the shortest *sūra* in the Qur’ān, and it contains reports about the unseen matters: about Kawthar and its immensity and abundance which indicates that the Prophet will have the greatest number of Followers. The second is about al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīra, who was a wealthy man with many children when this was revealed, and then later he was destroyed.

- The Arabic usage used in it is beyond what any Arab could master and they all agree that it is correct.

- It talks of matters which occurred from the beginning of the world until the time of its revelation, all this issuing from the mouth of someone illiterate who could neither read nor write. It reports about the stories of Prophets with their communities and past generations as well as those matters the People of the Book asked about when they challenged him about the People of the Cave, al-Khiḍr and Mūsā, and Dhū'l-Qarnayn. Qāḍī Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib points out that we know that there was no way for him to learn this because he did not have contact with people with knowledge of history or frequent a teacher so that he could take from them, and so it is known that it could only have come by way of revelation.
- There is the fulfilment of Allah's promises which were visually perceived in all that He promised in the Qur'ān. That is divided into general reports, like promising His Messenger, peace be upon him, victory and expelling those who expelled him, and promises which have preconditions like, *"If someone trusts in Allah, He is enough for him."* (65:3)
- There are reports about unseen matters in the future which could only be known by revelation. Part of that is Allah's promise to His Prophet that his *dīn* would overcome all other *dīns*, as happened. When Abū Bakr sent his armies on expeditions, he would inform them of Allah's promise to make His *dīn* victorious so that they would be confident of victory and certain of success. 'Umar also did that, and the conquests continued in the east and west. Allah says, *"Allah has promised those of you who believe and do right actions that He will make them the successors in the land as He made those before them the successors."* (24:55)
- There is the knowledge that the Qur'ān contains, which is the basis for all people regarding the lawful and unlawful and other rulings.
- There are eloquent expressions of wisdom which do not normally issue from a human being.

- The perfect symmetry of the entire Qur'ān, outward and inward without disparity or inconsistency, is a final factor. Allah says, *“If it had been from other than Allah, they would have found many inconsistencies in it.”* (4:82)

These are ten points and an eleventh, mentioned by an-Nazzām¹ and some Qadarīs, is that the meaning of inimitability is the impossibility of opposition and being prevented from undertaking to meet the challenge. They said that the prohibition and diverting people from attempting to do that are the miracle rather than the Qur'ān itself. That is because Allah directed their aspirations away from undertaking the challenge to bring a *sūra* like it. This is false because the consensus of the community without any disagreement is that the Qur'ān itself is the miracle, not the diversion and prohibition because its eloquence and lucidity are beyond normal patterns. If there had been any words like it, it would not be the case.

1. A famous Mu'tazilite in Baghdād, d.c. 221/836.